

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY ATHENS
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY JIDDA

UNCLAS DAMASCUS 0702

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: BEXP, BENC, SY, JO, SA
SUBJ: FGT: HEJAZ RAILWAY STUDY: UPDATE

REF: 77 DAMASCUS 4557 (T-87), ET AL.

1. COMOFF CALLED ON NEW SYRIAN DEPUTY MINISTER OF TRANSPORT ANWAR BARAZI, 2/1, TO GET UPDATE ON PROPOSED PROJECT TO MODERNIZE AND EXTEND HEJAZ RAILWAY FROM DAMASCUS TO MEDINA. ACCORDING TO BARAZI, SIX-MAN TECHNICAL COMMITTEE (WITH TWO MEMBERS EACH FROM SYRIA, JORDAN, AND SAUDI ARABIA) HAS BEEN MEETING REGULARLY TO SIFT THROUGH SOME 90 PREQUALIFICATION STATEMENTS RECEIVED IN RESPONSE TO CALL FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST. ORIGINAL GROUP OF 90 HAS BEEN REDUCED TO FORTY: BARAZI WOULD NOT SAY IF ANY OF THE THREE US FIRMS SUBMITTING PREQUALIFICATION DOCUMENTS WERE AMONG THE SURVIVORS. THE COMMITTEE PLANS TO SELECT A SHORTLIST OF TEN FIRMS AND ASK THEM TO SUBMIT TECHNICAL AND PRICE OFFERS FOR A FEASIBILITY STUDY OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT. BARAZI SAID THAT THE SELECTION PROCESS HAD BEEN SLOWED BY THE INCLUSION OF THE SAUDIS, WHO BELATEDLY DECIDED TO JOIN IN (REFTEL UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 02 DAMASC 00702 032349Z

DESCRIBED PROJECT AS IMPROVEMENT ONLY OF DAMASCUS-AMMAN LINK). SAUDIS WILL FOOT THE MAJOR PART OF THE BILL IF THE PROJECT IS CARRIED THROUGH, SAID BARAZI.

2. COMOFF ASKED BARAZI IF HE BELIEVED PROJECT ECONOMICALLY VIABLE, GIVEN VERY HEAVY CONSTRUCTION COSTS, NEED TO REPLACE ALL ROLLING STOCK, MACHINE SHOPS, STATIONS AND

PROBABLE ONE-WAY TRAFFIC PATTERN. HE SAID HE WAS CONVINCED A MODERNIZED HEJAZ LINE WOULD BE PROFITABLE AND WENT ON AT LENGTH ABOUT THE TRANSIT TRADE BENEFITS TO SYRIA OF RAIL-BOURNE TRAFFIC FROM THE SYRIAN PORTS OF LATTAKIA AND TARTOUS TO JORDAN AND SAUDI ARABIA. COMOFF ASKED IF PLANS INCLUDED UPGRADING NARROW-GUAGE LEBANESE LINE IN ORDER TO LINK BEIRUT PORT TO DAMASCUS AND AN IMPROVED HEJAZ NETWORK. HE REPLIED HE WAS INTERESTED IN "NOURISHING SYRIAN PORTS, NOT LEBANESE."

3. BIO NOTES ON BARAZI: THE NEW DEPUTY MINISTER ASSUMED HIS POST ABOUT TWO MONTHS AGO, REPLACING AMIN BARZAGHEL, WHO, HE SAID, HAD "HAD PROBLEMS" (WE HAD HEARD THAT HE WAS LUKEWARM ON THE HEJAZ PROJECT). BORN IN HAMA, BARAZI IS A CIVIL ENGINEER (EDUCATED IN CAIRO) AND MOVED TO HIS PRESENT POST FORM CHIEF OF CONSTRUCTION IN THE MINISTRY OF PUBLIC WORKS. HE LOOKS ABOUT 50 AND IS HANDSOME AND DISTINGUISHED-LOOKING IN A WARREN BURGER WAY. HE IS MARRIED. ONE OF HIS BROTHERS, DR. ADNAN BARAZI, MARRIED AN AMERICAN AND NOW LIVES IN CHICAGO; DR BARAZI WAS CHIEF OF MEZZE MILITARY HOSPITAL, DAMASCUS, AND WE INFER THAT HE HAD GIVE UP THAT POST WHEN HE MARRIED A FOREIGNER. BARAZI HAS OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS LIVING AND STUDYING IN THE STATES, AND HE WOULD LIKE TO VISIT THE US. BARAZI SPEAKS SOME ENGLISH, BUT IS FAR FROM FLUENT.

UNCLASSIFIED

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PAGE 03 DAMASC 00702 032349Z

4. AMMAN AND JIDDA: WOULD APPRECIATE ANY NEW INFORMATION ON HEJAZ PROJECT FROM YOUR PRESPECTIVES.
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